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Security Council

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Friday, 7 April 2017, 11.30 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.

Expression of sympathy on the terrorist attack in Stockholm

The President: On behalf of the Council, I would first like to offer my condolences to the Government of Sweden and the victims of the senseless attack today in Stockholm. We have been reminded this week that the scourge of terrorism affects many countries, and we are united in our shared resolve.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: Let me also convey, on behalf of those of us in the Secretariat, our condolences and our shock to our friends from Sweden on the attacks in Stockholm. The Secretary-General is following this with great concern.

The Council has requested the Secretariat to provide an update on Syria. In addition, the Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, will brief the Council in less than a week. I will therefore keep my remarks short.

In the last two months, we have seen the 30 December 2016 ceasefire falter amid a steady escalation of military activity. In mid-February, Government forces escalated their military operations in several areas of Damascus and Homs, recapturing Wadi Barada and Al-Waer in Homs. Military advances there were accompanied by the large-scale evacuation of fighters and their families. The Syrian Government cited the presence of the Al-Nusra Front in these areas, claims that were disputed by the opposition. Subsequently, during February and March, armed opposition groups, sometimes coordinating with the Al-Nusra Front, launched offensives in Dar'a, Damascus and Hamah.

On 4 April, as Government forces were fighting to regain territory recently lost to opposition offensives in northern Hamah, alarming reports emerged of an alleged chemical attack in nearby Khan Shaykhun, in southern Idlib. Sources on the ground reported airstrikes. The Council, of course, discussed this at an emergency meeting on 5 April (see S/PV.7915).

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has announced that its Fact-Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic is starting to investigate the alleged Khan Shaykhun attack. The Secretary-General, in a public statement, shared that he was appalled by the chemical-weapons attack in Khan Shaykhun and the deaths of and injury to many innocent civilians.

This morning at approximately 4.35 a.m., two United States naval vessels deployed in the eastern Mediterranean Sea launched a total of 59 cruise missiles targeting the Al-Shayrat military airbase in Homs governorate. The United States has stated that this was in response to what it says was the Syrian Government's use of chemical weapons from this airbase. The United States claimed that the missiles severely damaged or destroyed Syrian aircraft and support infrastructure and equipment. According to news reports, the United States said that it had informed Russian Federation forces of the strike in advance, using the established de-confliction mechanism, and taking precautions to minimize the risk to Russian or Syrian personnel located at the airfield.

A statement from the Syrian General Command of the army and the armed forces called the attack a "blatant act of aggression" that had caused six deaths and "huge material damage". Iran and the Russian Federation condemned the attack. The United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands and New Zealand have expressed some support for the strikes.

The Security Council has the primary responsibility for international peace and security. We hope that the Council can unite and exercise that responsibility to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun. It is important that the Council send a strong collective message that any use of chemical weapons will not be tolerated and will have consequences. The Secretary-General stresses that the international

community has a responsibility to hold any perpetrator of chemical-weapons attacks accountable and to ensure that chemical weapons are never again used as an instrument of warfare.

The protection of civilians and accountability should be at the top of our peace and security agenda. In the case of Syria, there can be no genuine protection if the parties to the conflict, Government and opposition alike, are permitted to act with impunity and if the Syrian Government continues to commit human rights violations against its own citizens. Protecting the Syrian people requires immediate action, action that is rooted in the principles of the United Nations and international law. Mindful of the risk of escalation, the Secretary-General has publicly appealed for restraint in order to avoid any acts that could deepen the suffering of the Syrian people. We further urge all parties involved in military operations to abide by international humanitarian law and take all necessary precautions to avoid and minimize civilian casualties.

As the Secretary-General has said, these events underscore our belief that the only way to resolve the conflict is through a political settlement. We urge the parties to renew their commitment to making progress in the Geneva talks as soon as possible. In that regard, resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex) remain the foundation of United Nations mediation efforts and contain the core principles for them — and, ultimately, for a solution.

The President: I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Madam President, for giving me the floor and for organizing today's open meeting of the Council. It is essential to ensure that the entire world, not just the members of our Organization, can be witness to Council members' positions with complete transparency in the wake of the recent events in Syria.

The delegation of Bolivia asked that today's meeting be held because we are concerned about the events of the past 24 hours. While the Security Council was debating proposals about what the investigation mechanism should be for the horrendous chemical attacks witnessed by the whole world, while we were discussing how to word a draft resolution for the Council's consideration and while the permanent and non-permanent members were making suggestions about its text, the United States was once again preparing and carrying out a unilateral attack. Those missile attacks are indeed a unilateral action and represent a serious threat to international peace and security. That is because for the past 70 years humankind has been creating and building a structure that is not just physical or institutional but also legal. We have created international legal instruments precisely in order to avoid situations in which the most powerful can attack the weakest with impunity, to ensure a balance of power in the world and to avoid the most serious kinds of violations of international peace and security.

We believe it is the duty not only of the Security Council but of all the bodies of the United Nations to defend multilateralism. That is why we are here. We have agreed that the Charter of the United Nations must be respected, and the Charter forbids unilateral actions. Any action must be authorized by the Security Council in accordance with the Charter. I would like to refresh our memories a little by reading from Article 24, which states that

> "In order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf."

The Security Council is not just the 15 members who are seated here at this table. We represent the 193 States Members of this Organization, and through them we represent the people of the world. And we have agreed that unilateral actions violate international law. Yesterday, as we in the Security Council were discussing draft resolutions and striving to come up with alternatives and consensus, the United States not only launched a unilateral attack but — while we were discussing and demanding an independent, impartial, thorough and conclusive investigation of those previous attacks — the United States had taken it upon itself to be investigator, prosecutor, judge and jury. Where is the investigation that would enable us to establish objectively who was responsible for the attacks? This is an extremely serious violation of international law.

This is not the first time that this has happened. Throughout our history we can recall many episodes

in which not just the United States but various Powers have acted unilaterally and violated the Charter. But the fact that it has now happened again does not mean that the United Nations and its members must accept it. In September 2013 the United States also launched attacks on Syria. I would like to recall what the then Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, said at the time, and I will read it in English, if I may.

(*spoke in English*)

> "[T]he Security Council has primary responsibility for international peace and security... That is my appeal, that everything should be handled within the framework of the United Nations Charter. The use of force is lawful only when in exercise of self-defence in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, and/or when the Security Council approves such action."

(*spoke in Spanish*)

That was the position of the then Secretary-General, which helped to avert the taking of unilateral action in circumstances very similar to those we are experiencing today. This attack represents a threat to international peace and security because it threatens the political processes in Geneva and Astana. Mr. Feltman expressed it very well in the message from the Secretary-General when he said that it is essential to avoid any escalation of tensions that could damage the progress that has been made in Astana and Geneva.

As I said, this is not the first time this has happened, and I would like to recall here something that happened some years ago, on Wednesday, 5 February 2003, when the then Secretary of State of the United States of America came to this Chamber in order to present to us what he said in his own words was convincing proof that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (see S/PV.4701). I believe that it is essential that we remember those images and the fact that in this very Chamber we were told that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and that was the reason for the proposed invasion. That invasion resulted in 1 million deaths and set in motion a series of atrocities in the region. Would we be talking about the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham without that invasion? Would we be talking about the series of horrific attacks that have occurred in various parts of the world without that illegal invasion? I believe it is vital that we remember what history teaches us, and on that occasion the United States affirmed that it had all the proof necessary to show that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. They were never, ever found.

I would like to repeat here what President Evo Morales Ayma said this morning.

> "I think and feel — I hope not to be wrong — that chemical weapons in Syria are an excuse for a military intervention. Unilateral actions are imperialistic actions. The United States is not interested in international law. It sets the United Nations aside when it suits it. Internal problems of States must be resolved through dialogue, not through bombing. This action threatens international security and world peace."

It is important that we talk about the double-standards — when we are in the United Nations meeting rooms, on the one hand, and when we are dealing with what can be considered real life, on the other hand. My own peoples — the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean — have lived this reality throughout our history. They speak to us in the language of human rights, which we are supposed to live up to, but when their interests make the human rights discourse inconvenient for them, they systematically violate human rights.

The series of coups d'état in Latin America was organized and financed by the CIA. That is historical truth. It is not rhetoric. It is not a speech-making. It is the truth. Let us remember the coup d'état in 1973 against the constitutional Government of Salvador Allende, which was financed by the CIA. Let us remember the Escuela de las Americas at which soldiers were taught to torture people. There were training manuals for torture, which was taught to Latin American military personnel as part of the so-called national security doctrine.

When they are interested in human rights, the human rights are fine, but when human rights no longer comport with their interests, human rights no longer matter. The same goes for democracy. When it suits their interests, they are defenders of democracy, but when it does not they finance coups d'états. And unfortunately the same thing is happening with the United Nations and with the Security Council itself. When it is no longer in line with their interests, then multilateralism is not important. For the few things that suit them, multilateralism is fine. The United Nations is fine, but when it opposes their interests, then they are no longer interested in the United Nations, human rights or democracy.

When we unequivocally condemn chemical attacks, we are saying that the Security Council must not be used as an echo chamber for war propaganda or interventionism. The Security Council should not be used as a pawn that can be sacrificed on a chess board, the chess board of war. The Security Council is ultimately the last hope we have to guarantee international peace and security, based on principles, norms and the international rule of law.

I would also like to point out that, just as you have convened this meeting in a very transparent manner, Madam President, it is absolutely vital that we show concern about the unfortunate fact that there are first-class and second-class members of the Security Council — the permanent members that not only have the right to veto but also control the procedures that govern decision-making, and the other 10, which are members only temporarily, that are brought in or consulted only occasionally, not to carry any weight but simply to support the positions of the permanent five. This is not multilateralism.

Bolivia would like to reiterate its strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons or the use of chemical-weapons precursors as an unjustifiable and criminal act regardless of its motivation, wherever it may be, whenever it may be and by whomsoever it may be committed. We reiterate that when these cases arise we demand independent, impartial, complete and conclusive investigations.

Unfortunately, yesterday's attacks have dealt a mortal blow to the Joint Investigative Mechanism and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and their ability to carry out an investigation and find out exactly what happened a few days ago in Syria. We reiterate that those responsible for acts must be duly prosecuted and punished to the fullest extent of the law. The same is true of any actions that violate international law and that endanger international security.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I deeply regret that the previous speaker showed more outrage against the United States than against the Al-Assad regime, which on Tuesday deliberately dropped chemical weapons killing over 100 men, women and children in the most barbaric fashion.

More than three and a half years ago, the Syrian regime made a pledge: it would join the 189 countries that had already signed the Chemical Weapons Convention and it would reveal the full extent of its chemical arsenal and proceed with its full destruction. What spurred this pledge was a chemical-weapon attack that time in Ghouta. Hundreds, if not thousands, were dead. There were images of men, women and children choking, foaming at the mouth, clearly asphyxiated.

Three and a half years after a historically heinous war crime was committed, after the stockpiles were supposed to be destroyed, Al-Assad on Tuesday showed us yet again, this time in Idlib, that he is capable of redefining horror. Tuesday's attack must be fully investigated. Impunity cannot be the norm. We will continue to work with our partners on the Security Council to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

The United Kingdom supports the United States air strike on the Al-Shayrat air field because war crimes have consequences, and the greatest war criminal of all, Bashar Al-Assad, has now been put on notice. The United States strike was a proportionate response to unspeakable acts that gave rise to overwhelming humanitarian distress. It was also a strong effort to save lives by ensuring that such acts never happen again.

The resolution that we adopted three and a half years ago (resolution 2118 (2013)) provided a framework for the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria. It had a clear author and a clear guarantor. At the time, Russia assured us that Al-Assad would fully declare his chemical arsenal and would continue to cooperate with international inspectors. Perhaps that was the assurance that Russia received from Al-Assad, and perhaps Russia has now learned the hard lesson that backing a war criminal comes with its own consequence: humiliation.

Russia has barely any support from the Arab world for its policy of propping up the criminal Al-Assad regime as it carries out chemical-weapon attacks against its own people. Russia needs to listen to the Security Council, listen to the Arab world, listen to the rest of the international community, and above all listen to the Syrian people. Their message is clear: end Al-Assad's bombs, his use of chemical weapons, his torture dungeons.

Instead, Russia has given Al-Assad everything he could dream of. Without Russia's seven vetoes in the Security Council defying the views of other members of the Council, Al-Assad would now have faced sanctions and justice. And what did Russia get for its unconditional support? Al-Assad ignores Russia's requests for him to obey a ceasefire. Al-Assad defies Russia's request for

him not to gas his own people. Al-Assad thumbs his nose at Russia's calls for him to join a peace process. Russia sits in this Chamber today humiliated by its failure to bring to heel a puppet dictator entirely propped up by Russia itself and Hizbullah and Iran.

Let me bust some myths about our private negotiations over the past couple of days. We were seeking agreement on a draft resolution. I repeatedly asked the delegation of the Russian Federation why it could not support our draft resolution. If it wanted the truth, why did it not want the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to have access to the places, the people and the information that they needed? What possible excuse does the Russian Federation have for keeping that information from the investigators? What reason does it have to continue to protect Al-Assad? If it cared about the Charter of the United Nations, why would it protect a dictator who has repeatedly violated international law? I received no answer.

There is another way for Russia. I appeal to the Russian Federation to abandon its failed strategy; join the rest of the Council in its call for justice and accountability; end its protection of a war criminal; and join all of us in supporting a genuine political process that would lead to a transition to a more legitimate and representative Government.

The only reason that we are here and these discussions are taking place at this moment in the Chamber is because the international community has not done enough. Things can be different. The difference that can and must be made lies in a political solution. That will not happen if we take the familiar route that has plagued the Council, the countries of the region and the millions of Syrians looking for a future. The new road must see the Syrian regime engage. The new road must have Russia and Iran not only at the table but negotiating in good faith.

We are here within the walls of an Organization that was built to guide us when peace seems out of reach. The United Nations has a vital role in convening those negotiations and helping the parties resolve their disputes. The agenda has been set, and it is long overdue that a proper negotiation happens on a future Syrian-led transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. Al-Assad must engage in serious discussion about that future to meet the aspirations of all Syrians.

In conclusion, the United Kingdom supports the United States action as an appropriate response to a heinous act by a brutal and uncaring dictator who believes that gassing his people is somehow a legitimate step on the road to stability. It is now time to get a genuine political process back up and running. Those discussions may be long and difficult, but the people of Syria deserve nothing less. If we want to ensure that the shocking images that have haunted us this week are truly confined to history, then that is our duty.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We have been following with great concern events following the Khan Shaykhun incident, which claimed the lives of dozens of innocent Syrian civilians. Numerous reports have confirmed that the incident was once again the result of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We have also been following the dangerous developments concerning the Syrian situation on the ground since last night.

The Khan Shaykhun incident and other incidents and crimes in Syria of the past seven years are a clear indication of a lack of conscience. They are living proof that the people of the region — specially the Syrian people — are the main victims of a proxy war that has paralysed the international community. Serious dialogue has been absent because of the decision of many parties to fall back on their narrow interests, as if the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians and the displacement of millions of Syrians were only a matter of collateral damage to be deferred to a later date following a political deal that the puppeteers of this war might reach in line with their interests.

I honestly believe that, within the Security Council, the disagreements and the rivalries that sometimes concern issues unrelated to Syria have led to the daily increase in the number of innocent civilians killed. We are exasperated by statements of regret and condemnation by the international community following every human tragedy that befalls the Syrian people. We are fed up with such statements because they have become empty expressions and mere words that are unaccompanied by any genuine and serious international effort that would meet the interests of the Syrian people and have a genuine impact on their daily lives. I therefore urgently call on all members to dispense with their disagreements and divergent views, and focus on a way out of the Syrian maze.

All parties at the international, regional and Syrian levels should support an immediate ceasefire and seriously and objectively move forward without any preconditions or procedural manipulation within the framework of the International Syrian Support Group (ISSG) under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva.

We believe that the Syrian people are capable of determining their own future. However, achieving their aspirations for democracy, reconstruction and stability is impossible without genuine international support for containing the negative impact of the spoilers and helping Syrians combat terrorism in Syria and build their own State on a firm and stable foundation.

Perhaps the time has come to be frank. I call on the United States and the Russian Federation in particular, owing to their capacities, role as co-Chairs of the ISSG and their influence on the various local and regional parties, to move resolutely in that direction in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions to reach middle ground and a political settlement in Syria. I urge them to resume their coordination and cooperation on the ground and in the political realm so as to salvage what can be salvaged and avoid any further deterioration of the situation.

In conclusion, I stress that a Syrian settlement will be possible only if it is based on clear and sincere intentions. Egypt will welcome every honest and serious action to save Syria from the abyss and contain the present and future repercussions of the crisis in the region.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing and for relaying the message from the Secretary-General.

In the midst of horrendous attacks, several decades ago the British people coined an expression that is truly appropriate for today: "Keep calm and carry on". We believe that today more than ever our first priority should be to keep calm and continue in our work. For despite its complicated and long-running, the Syrian conflict must remain within the multilateral.And that is precisely why the Security Council has a primary responsibility. We must resolutely reinvigorate and strengthen the political nature of the three primary forums in which the issue has been discussed — the Security Council, the Geneva negotiations and the Astana talks — so as to strengthen the ceasefire and contain the use of violence.

The fundamental principles that guide the conduct of Uruguay at the international level are deeply rooted in its character as a small country without an army posing a threat to absolutely anyone else. The non-use of force in international relations is therefore a cardinal principle Uruguay's foreign policy. We accept the use of force only in accordance with the principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. Uruguay deems any other use of force illegitimate.

Uruguay, throughout its history, has consistently rejected the unilateral use of force, including in such cases as the 1950s Korean invasion and the invasion of Hungary, as well as the use of force against Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan and Iran. We have always rejected the unilateral use of force. Uruguay hopes that this individual incident, which occurred against the backdrop of the inability of the main Powers to resolve the conflict in Syria, does not lead to additional attacks and that the parties will refrain from further actions that will only aggravate the situation and lead to an endless spiral of violence that could also spread, directly or indirectly, to other neighbouring countries.

Uruguay believes that the principles of international law must be considered as a whole and that therefore another key principle here is absolute respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In the past six years, we have seen the worst atrocities committed against the civilian population. The investigations carried out by the Joint Investigative Mechanism have revealed the use of chemical weapons by both the Syrian Government and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham/Da'esh terrorist group. The most recent example was Tuesday's horrendous chemical-weapon attack, a war crime that should receive the strongest possible condemnation on the part of the international community, as the use of chemical weapons poses a threat to international peace and security.

However, in the midst of all of this we must not overlook the Council's duty to identify those responsible for the chemical-weapon attack in Khan Shaykhun. Up until a few hours ago, the Council was intensively negotiating to adopt a draft resolution that would facilitate the conduct of an investigation aimed at determining who was responsible. Now more than ever

before, the Council must shoulder its responsibilities so as to clarify that incident and demand accountability for the abhorrent crimes committed.

We must also reflect on the situation in which the Council finds itself owing to the existence of the privilege of the veto in the adoption of its resolutions, and the aggravating factor of the use or threat of the use of the veto with respect to resolutions relating to crimes against humanity.

Uruguay, as a signatory to the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group code of conduct, calls once again on the members of the Council to commit to not use the veto in situations of this kind. The use of the veto strips the Council of its functionality and effectiveness and further imbalances its work. We reiterate the importance of resuming all multilateral negotiations under way so as to bring about a solution to the conflict that is afflicting the Syrian people.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): At the outset, let me express our solidarity with the Government of Sweden and our condolences in connection with the victims of the attack this morning in Stockholm.

It bears repeating that the attack conducted on Khan Shaykhun on 4 April was ruthless and cruel, with a high death toll that included many children. It is a vile action that Italy and the European Union have firmly condemned and that add to Al-Assad's repeated violations of the ceasefire and the acts of violence repeatedly perpetrated by his armed forces against civilians.

The Government of Italy is closely following the events that are unfolding in the Mediterranean in consideration of its many and direct interests in the stability of the region, where we are also playing a role as the security provider for the international community.

As Foreign Minister Alfano stated this morning, Italy understands the reasons for the United States' military action, which was proportionate in time and manner and a response to a prolonged sense of impunity that is completely unacceptable. It is also a deterrent to the risk of any further use of chemical weapons in Syria, in addition to the cases already ascertained by the United Nations, for which there already should have been a prompt and meaningful response, including in terms of accountability, which the Council must continue to seek.

It is now, we believe, necessary and urgent to bring together all the main actors involved in the Syrian crisis so that they can work together to finally achieve a political solution that will free the Syrian people from of the tragedy that they been suffering for the past six years.

We must take a forward-looking approach. Italy calls on the international community to continue and redouble its efforts to achieve a United Nations-led political transition in Syria, in compliance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). This remains the only way out of the crisis and the only way to avoid further violence and further tragedies in the country.

We believe that all parties must now leverage all their influence so as to facilitate a real ceasefire, ensure full access to humanitarian aid and promote a process aimed at progressively building trust between the Syrian parties.

All of the different tracks of the Syrian issue — the non-proliferation of chemical weapons, cessation of hostilities, the fight against terrorism, humanitarian access and political talks — can advance only if the Security Council is united. As an elected member of the Council, Italy will continue to work towards this strategic goal.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): My statement is an extension of the joint communiqué issued last night by the President of the French Republic, Mr. François Hollande, and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Ms. Angela Merkel.

I, too, would like to begin by expressing once again to Sweden our most sincere condolences and full solidarity with it following the tragic terrorist attack in Stockholm this morning.

The Security Council is meeting once again following the use of chemical weapons by the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. Almost four years after the large-scale massacre in Ghouta, in August 2013, the 4 April attack has revealed the truth: Al-Assad has never renounced the use of chemical weapons or deviated from his ultimate goal: the annihilation, pure and simple, of all those who resist him, whatever the price may be.

France has consistently called for strong action on the part of the international community in the face of the serious and repeated violations of international humanitarian law by the Damascus regime, which

constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, as was already underscored by the Secretary-General in 2013 following the chemical attack of 21 August 2013. My country has spared no effort to ensure that these crimes do not go unpunished. That includes proposing that the Security Council refer the matter to the International Criminal Court. Those initiatives, however, have been met with obstacles and vetoes, notably Russia's. The Syrian regime has violated its international obligations to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction. The actions of Syria also constitute a clear violation of the resolutions of the Security Council.

In that context, the American airstrike constitutes a legitimate response to the chemical attack. The airstrike is also an important reminder that the future use of such weapons will not be tolerated. To those who pretend to be astonished, Bashar Al-Assad bears full responsibility for the situation. For years, the regime has openly flouted the basic principles of our system of collective security. It has repeatedly and systematically violated its obligations under international humanitarian law, the norm on the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons, particularly against civilians, as well as Security Council resolutions. It has become imperative to respond and deter the regime from such actions.

Recourse by anyone to chemical weapons constitutes a war crime and a crime against humanity, which cannot go unpunished. Syria cannot be an exception. That was already the position of France in the aftermath of the chemical attack on Ghouta, and we have never deviated from it. The international community can no longer be duped by the dilatory tactics of the Al-Assad regime.

In adopting resolution 2118 (2013), the Security Council made a very clear commitment to sanction any failure by Syria to fulfil its obligations. That has not prevented Bashar Al-Assad's regime from continuing its repeated, methodical and barbaric use of weapons of mass destruction since 2013, openly flouting the authority of the Council and its international commitments. Those violations have been irrefutably documented by a mechanism created by the Security Council, the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

On 28 February, action by the Security Council was once again prevented by Russia's unwarranted and abusive use of the veto (see S/PV.7893). That blockage was perceived by the Al-Assad regime as a signal of impunity. In parallel, Russia has not met its responsibilities or exerted the necessary pressure on the regime in Damascus. It is the responsibility of all of the members of the Council to ensure that light be shed on the circumstances of the attack carried out by the Syrian regime in Khan Shaykhun and that its perpetrators are held accountable for their actions before a court of law.

France reiterates its full support for the mechanisms of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to carry out a diligent inquiry into the matter. France will not compromise regarding the disintegration of the chemical non-proliferation regime. France will continue to work with its partners to strengthen it in all relevant forums.

The attack of 4 April definitively demonstrated to the world the urgent need for a political solution in Syria. The maintenance in power of a dictator who carries out chemical attacks against civilians is not only a moral abomination. It is an unsustainable threat to the region and to the world.

All members of the Council agree on one point: the Syrian crisis will never be settled by military means alone. Today, because of the tragedy of Khan Shaykhun, we have the moral and political responsibility to reinvigorate the talks that have begun in Geneva to find a political settlement in Syria under the auspices of the United Nations. That is the top priority. In that context, France calls on the international community to coalesce around a political transition in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex). France and its European partners will soon be circulating proposals in that regard.

Our responsibility is to history. Every member of the Security Council, particularly Russia, must live up to their responsibilities. We must commit ourselves to seeking an urgent political solution. It is an urgent matter because we are talking about the security of the Syrian people and the region. The fight against terrorism is at stake. Let us not forget that Al-Assad's regime is the biggest generator of terrorism.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Syrian conflict has been going on for seven years, which has led to large numbers of casualties among innocent civilians. China would like to empathize with the profound suffering of the Syrian people. The present situation must not last any longer. Swift action must be taken. We must resort to dialogue and consultations in

order to assure an appropriate solution. We must help the Syrian people lift themselves out of suffering at an early date, help Syria rebuild itself and ensure that Syrians can lead peaceful and stable lives.

China has always advocated for dialogue and consultations as the best means to resolve international conflicts. All parties need to make efforts to prevent the situation in Syria from further deteriorating. A political solution is the only way out of the situation. A military solution will not work. It would only exacerbate the suffering of the Syrian people, further complicating the situation in the region and making it more turbulent, which is not in the common interests of Syria, countries of the region or the international community.

China calls upon all relevant parties to firmly persist in diplomatic efforts, insist on a political solution to the situation in Syria through dialogue and consultations and support the role of the United Nations, including the efforts of Special Envoy De Mistura, as the main channel of mediation and achieving progress in the Geneva talks. We should therefore safeguard all efforts to maintain the hard-won momentum for a political solution to the Syrian question.

Recent days have brought about complications in certain areas of Syria. The international community must remain highly alert regarding such relevant developments. We must stick to uniform criteria in fighting against all terrorist organizations listed by the Security Council.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I join others in expressing my sincere condolences to the families of the victims of today's attack in Stockholm. We stand in solidarity with the people of Sweden.

Turning to Syria, the use of chemical weapons is not permissible under any circumstances. Three days ago, we faced another shocking report that many innocent civilians had become victims of chemical weapons in Syria. The act is extremely inhumane and violates the relevant Security Council resolutions. The Government of Japan supports the determination of the United States Government to never allow the spread or use of chemical weapons. We understand that the United States took the action last night in order to prevent further aggravation of the situation.

The Council must reaffirm its determination to address the reported use of chemical weapons in Idlib. Once again, Japan urges the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission to expeditiously conduct an investigation and report its conclusion as soon as possible, so that the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism can conduct its own investigation in order to identify those who are responsible.

In conclusion, Japan reiterates its position that there is no military solution for Syria. We must advance the political process based on resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, we convey our deep condolences to the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations following the tragedy that took place in Stockholm.

On the night of 7 April, the United States carried out an attack on the territory of sovereign Syria. We describe that attack as a flagrant violation of international law and an act of aggression. We strongly condemn the illegitimate actions by the United States, whose consequences for regional and international stability could be extremely serious. The attack was a flagrant violation of the 2015 memorandum on preventing air incidents and ensuring security during operations in Syrian airspace. The Russian Ministry of Defence has stopped its cooperation with the Pentagon under that memorandum.

In recent times, the United States Administration has often talked about the need to combat international terrorism, and that provided the justification for American troops and their allies being present on Syrian soil, although they were there without the invitation of the legitimate Government of Syria and without the approval of the Security Council. Manipulating Articles of the Charter of the United Nations is beyond any criticism. The aggression by the United States has merely served to strengthen terrorism. The attack was directed at Syrian armed forces infrastructure and its air force. In other words, it was directed at those, who over all these years, have been involved in the fight against terrorism. It is not difficult to imagine how much terrorists' spirits were raised after the attack by Washington.

Immediately following the attack, major attacks were perpetrated by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front against Syrian military sites. Once again, we repeat that the Syrian armed forces will continue to be the main anti-terrorist entity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Who will combat

terrorism? Will it be the illegal armed groups that have entered Syria by the hundreds of thousands? Iraqi and Libyan military bases have been destroyed, and look at what then happened. Such actions are contrary to international decisions, including the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), which we all played a part in designing. The communiqué includes references to settlement, while ensuring that national institutions remain intact. Are those actions the way to ensure sustainability?

The Russian Federation, from the tribune of the United Nations, has stated the need to establish an international coalition to combat terrorism, which would be based on international law. On many occasions, we have sent signals to Washington about our readiness to undertake such cooperation. As we see it, Washington has chosen a different path. We must recall that unilateral actions lead to reprehensible and tragic consequences for region and its inhabitants. Think about the consequences and remember the outcome of United States actions in the Middle East. Think about the steps it has taken and their impact on the process to bring about a political settlement in Syria. Unfortunately, today's appeal to move forward the political process after the military attack shows its hypocrisy. With regard to the Astana and Geneva tracks, clear progress has been made in recent days. What goals guided the United States when it undermined that progress, especially given that the progress achieved was no thanks to the United States at all.

Returning to the use of chemical weapons as a pretext yet again, the United States, the United Kingdom and France put forward a draft resolution (S/2017/172) that was quite erroneous in its very logic. The logic behind predetermining that Damascus was guilty was deeply flawed. What about the gold standard of the presumption of innocence? Why do they apply it in their own capitals but forget about it when it pertains to the Middle East and or to other regions? Why do the capitals of those countries forget that principle when it pertains to the Middle East and or to other regions? Why do they forget the presumption if innocence in such cases? All of that is taking place because Washington, London and Paris — I have spoken about this topic in closed consultations and would like to reiterate it — are paranoid about overthrowing the legitimate Government in sovereign Syria. That was clearly shown by non-diplomatic actions and the statements made by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, Mr. Rycroft. Stop putting forward such unprofessional arguments and levelling accusations against my country; they fly in the face of diplomacy. They are all lies. Once again, I warn them not teven try to sow the seeds of discord between us and the Arab world. Nothing will work or be achieved. That is why they are becoming annoyed. All Arab countries recall the colonial hypocrisy.

In his statement, Ambassador Rycroft tried to divert the attention from the core issue. Once again it did not work. That is why I would like to recall exact events. Those who put forward this initiative are in no way interested in an impartial investigation by a competent international body to determine exactly what took place in Khan Shaykhun. In addition, I would also state that they fear such an investigation. They are afraid of a genuinely independent investigation. What would happen if the outcome of that investigation were to contradict their anti-Government paradigm? They feared investigations into the events in Khan al-Asal, then in eastern Ghouta and now in Khan Shaykhun.

With regard to Khan Shaykhun, the Permanent Representative of the United States stated that there is credible evidence from the United States intelligence services who claimed that Syrian Government forces used chemical weapons. We said, "Show us, and experts will determine whether or not that was the case". I would recall that General Powell talked in this very Chamber about chemical weapons and weapons of mass destruction, which were not found (see S/PV.4701).

Let us work together as professionals, and not issue ultimatums. We are living in a very complex and multipolar world, and we cannot live like this. Russia has proposed a constructive alternative to its partners in the Security Council. They just didn't have a trump card or a winning alternative. They have not put forward any professional alternative or good arguments to us. Our initiative was specifically based on the appeal for specialists, chosen on a geographical basis by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission and the United Nations-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism on chemical weapons in Syria to visit the site where this incident took place in Khan Shaykhoun, as well as neighbouring areas, as soon as possible, in order to carry out a professional investigation.

All Syrian parties were asked to grant these expets immediate access to where the events took place. It

is not irrelevant to recall that the Syrian Government does not control that area of Idlib province. Supported from aborad, military groups that are closely linked to Al-Nusra Front terrrorist units rule over those territories, and they have things to hide, including in the context of chemical weapons. But some are trying to back them again, as they backed notorious bandits in eastern Aleppo. However, everything became clear once Aleppo was freed. It is no coincidence that the many complaints of the Syrian Government related to the massive entry of chemical weapons into the country, their warehousing by extremists in special warehouses and their use against the army and civilians have simply been ignored — or it has been considered for month after month with comtempt and without any outcome.

The OPCW Fact-finding Mission does not work in a conscientious manner. It prefers to be guided in its work by statements from opposition groups, Internet blogs, social networks and a whole range of non-governmental organizations of highly dubious reputation. They do not even look at information and evidence from areas where the incidents took place. And they want us to agree with that information? It is not even worth looking at.

In our draft resolution we also set out the need to establish a geographical balance with regard to staffing the investigation group. That is an important point, which has a direct bearing on the issue of impartiality and trust. Thus far, the Fact-finding Mission was usurped by representatives from a single country that is in the forefront of anti-Damascus parties.

Proof of blatant double standards includes ignoring the chemical attacks carried out by terrorists in the Middle East as a whole. In that regard, members could recall the recent events in Mosul, Iraq. Where was the international community's reaction? Where was their warning — first and foremost, of those who carried out this headline-grabbing public action in regard to Khan Shaykhoun? Are these victims of a different category? Are they perhaps second-rate victims? Why do we not see in their countries' headlines the tragedy in the besieged town of Mosul? We are talking about hundreds of thousands of people.

Thus is the attack in Syria an attempt to distract attention from the many victims among the peaceful populations in Iraq and Syria caused by unilateral actions, including attacks on homes and other civilian targets. There are no properly working Hhumanitarian corridors. Let us recall the little girl from Mosul named Hawra. No one said anything at all about this little girl, who became a symbol of this tragedy: everyone in her house was killed when a coalition bomb fell on her house. Thank God, the little girl lived. Sne had to fight for her life, but is now out of danger. However, she is almost blind. We will not set up a cynical show and hold up photographs here in the Chamber. But people must know about the Mosul tragedy.

Do not tell me that we are trying to draw attention away from Syria when we talk about Mosul. That is a lie. Those who know our position on this will know that this is a shameless lie. We do not want to draw anyone's attention from anything, in particular from what terrorists are doing. We merely want to say that if we are fighting terrorism, we should do it on the basis of single standards and not by dividing parties into good and bad, allies and foes. Let me say once again that no one should try to set us at odds with Iraq. No one will be able to ruin our relations that country. They should look at our relations with Iraq, as opposed to their own.

The 10 non-permanent members of the Security Council did try to find compromise last evening during the consultations we called for. They thanked the American delegation for the fact that voting had been postponed. However, there really was nothing to thank them for. Our colleagues did not even imagine that the decision was made with totally different ideas in mind. It certainly was not with the idea of continuing constructive and conciliatory dialogue. Washington had already chosen to take military action, which took place with members barely having left the United Nations building. We call upon the United States immediately to cease its aggression and to join the efforts being made towards a political settlement in Syria, as well as to work together to combat the terrorist threat. We are still prepared to engage in such cooperation.

We have heard many insulting words today with regard to our right to the veto — our right. We have won it and have exercised it in a responsible manner, but we use it only in such circumstances when others in the Security Council try to impose their irresponsible geopolitical projects. The Council must develop agreed international decisions. Reckless geopolitical schemes will never be supported.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): First and foremost, I would like to express, through our colleague Ambassador Skoog, the sincere condolences and sympathy of the Senegalese delegation to the people

and the Government of Sweden in connection with the tragic attack this morning.

We welcome the holding of this morning's emergency meeting, under the same format in which we gathered on 5 April (see S/PV.7915). But like on that day, with regard to late yesterday afternoon, we are today seeing a deep divide in the Security Council when it comes to the Syrian crisis — which, with the use of chemical weapons, the proliferation of terrorist groups and with the unprecedented catastrophic repercussions — is one that constitutes the most serious of our day. What image are we sending out to the international community? Above all, what message are we sending out to the Syrian people, who are lacerated and disoriented? That we have lost our direction? What other ambiguous message are we sending out to the terrorists who are proliferating in Syria.

Nothing can justify an atrocity such as the use of chemical weapons against civilians, even during a conflict. As a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Senegal reiterates its firm condemnation of the use of all kinds of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. My delegation would like to further encourage the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in its work, particularly in connection with its Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic, and commends its effort to bring together and analyse all the information from every available source in order to determine who is responsible for what.

Last September, in this very Chamber, the President of the Republic of Senegal, Mr. Macky Sall, stated that there could be no military solution to this crisis (see S/PV.7774). That is why my delegation reaffirms its strong conviction that only a negotiated solution, on the basis of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015), will make it possible to find a final outcome to this conflict. We must not forget that this agreement needs to cover the four following aspects: political, security, humanitarian and non-proliferation.

In that regard, my delegation wishes every success to the fifth round of the Geneva talks, which opened on 23 March, with the hope that, with the praiseworthy efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, who is going to brief us here next week, these talks will lead to substantial conclusions. The fourth meeting had made it possible for the first time to address substantial issues, such as constitutional reform, the political transition and the holding of elections under the observation of the United Nations.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I join others in expressing our heartfelt condolences to our Swedish colleagues on the terrorist act in Stockholm.

My delegation is greatly concerned by recent developments and the absence of unity among Security Council members over the chemical attack in Syria. We would like to make the following observations and recommendations on the critical political aspects pertaining to the situation in Syria.

We call on all parties concerned to refrain from actions that could increase the risks of a military escalation of tensions in Syria. We would like to emphasize that the lack of unanimity may destroy the new hopes of the Syrian people that arose following the adoption of the historical resolution 2336 (2015). We should not undermine an inclusive political negotiating process, as provided for in resolution 2254 (2015). The fifth round of intra-Syrian talks, held in Geneva from 23 to 31 March, were able this time to move from discussing formal and procedural issues to the substantive and political aspects of future peace talks. In that regard, we simply cannot allow a ceasefire to dissolve, as it is our last chance to realize the long-awaited peace on Syrian territory.

We consider the gas attacks in Syria to be a crime against humanity, and we strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons. It is important to conduct a thorough, objective and impartial investigation into all aspects of the chemical attack on Khan Shaykhun on 4 April, which will make it possible for the international community to render a fair verdict against the perpetrators, in full compliance with international law.

We would like to remind members of the Council that the principled position of Kazakhstan is not only the most severe condemnation of the use of weapons of mass destruction by any party, especially against the civilian population, but also the resolution of conflicts exclusively by peaceful means. We also have to respect the sovereignty of States that are States Members of the United Nations and the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. More important, we urgently need a political solution. Only a political diplomatic solution can bring about peace in Syria, and we call upon the international community to

exert political will to overcome their differences and negotiate peace and Syria.

The legitimate authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic and other parties must thoroughly execute their obligations of complying with the relevant recommendations made by Organization by the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations by accepting the personnel designated by them, while providing for and ensuring the security of activities undertaken by the personnel. In that regard, they must provide staff with immediate and unfettered access to, and the right to inspect, any and all sites in carrying out their functions, and allow immediate and unfettered access to individuals whom the OPCW has grounds to believe to be of importance for the purpose of its mandate.

The crisis in Syria, which is still unfolding, is having an impact not only on the region, but on the whole international community. Kazakhstan therefore believes that a regional approach involving neighbouring countries with influence on the parties in the Syrian conflict should be considered as a very effective method in mitigating the situation and preventing deterioration. There is a strong need to continue supporting the aims of the Astana talks and further Geneva negotiations in order to see positive outcomes. We welcome the significant results of the successful ministerial-level conference held in Brussels in April, chaired by the European Union and the United Nations and attended by many international governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. The pledges made are encouraging and send a message of solidarity to the people of Syria and all those impacted by the conflict. The pledges made at the meeting will increase the amount of the much-needed essential humanitarian assistance provided to the Syrian people, which is most important element to achieve our political objectives.

Finally, I will conclude by quoting Secretary-General Guterres who, at the opening plenary meeting of the Brussels conference on the theme "Supporting the future of Syria and the region", said, "the most difficult times call for the greatest efforts". And, I would add, and also the greatest of compromises.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): At the outset, I would like to say that I am really heartened by all the expressions of condolences and sympathies that are coming in as we speak on my telephone from all our friends in the Chamber this morning. I thank everyone for that.

I also thank you, Madam President, for convening this very important meeting. As we stated two days ago in this Chamber (see S/PV.7893), the alleged use of chemical weapons in the attack in Khan Shaykhun was abhorrent and unacceptable. If these allegations are proven to be correct, it will, unfortunately, be no surprise. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in Syria has concluded that chemical weapons have been used by the Syrian regime on at least three occasions. This latest attack only adds to the many other confirmed cases of international crimes committed in the Syrian conflict by all parties, most notably the Syrian regime.

The use of chemical weapons is clearly illegal, constitutes a threat to international peace and security and can amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity. There must be no impunity for such atrocities. Sweden has been extremely clear on the following points: the attack in Khan Shaykun must be condemned in the strongest terms; there needs to be a rapid, full and impartial investigation to confirm the use of chemical weapons; and those responsible for this horrendous attack must be held to account.

That is why we have worked tirelessly over the past few days to ensure that the Council adopts a strong draft resolution on a robust and immediate investigation into this outrage. While those efforts did not bear fruit yesterday, we still hope there is enough common ground for the Council to move forward on a strong draft resolution. Efforts should continue, and we will remain constructively and actively engaged.

With regard to the air strike by the United States of America last night, in response to the 4 April attack, it is important that action is based on international law. Last night's missile attack also raises questions as to its compatibility with international law. As the Secretary-General said, restraint is important to avoid any risk of escalation now.

Sweden has championed accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria.

We voted in favour of the draft resolution (S/2017/172) on accountability for the use of chemical weapons on 28 February. We endorsed European Union-targeted measures against those implicated in the use of chemical weapons. We support the JIM, including through financial support and technical expertise. We have also actively supported the

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, chaired by Mr. Pinheiro. We co-sponsored General Assembly resolution 71/248, which established the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, which, we hope, will begin its work very soon, and provided support through an initial contribution of approximately $400,000 to the Mechanism.

Instead of exchanging accusations and insults around this table, we now need to come together to urgently reinvigorate the United Nations-led political process. Ultimately, the only way of ending the suffering in Syria is by achieving a sustainable political solution. That will require a transitional political process based on resolution 2254 (2015). We reiterate our full support for the intra-Syrian talks under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva and the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, from whom we look forward to hearing next week. The parties must engage seriously.

Over the past few days, we have expressed our outrage over the latest atrocity in Khan Shaykhun. Yet every day the Syrian people continue to suffer the brutality of war in all its forms. It is high time to end the war in Syria and allow the Syrian people to determine their own future.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting.

Let me express our condolences to the Government of Sweden and our Swedish colleagues. We condemn the terrorist attack.

I would like to raise several points. First, if the situation in Syria continues, it will result in the collapse of the Syrian State. We have no doubt that the winners will be the terrorists. We have seen it too many times before. That perhaps is another indication that the international community enjoys no united stand on giving priority to resolving the Syrian crisis through political dialogue and countering the scourge of terrorism in a unified and concerted manner. Nevertheless, there is no justification for the crime committed on 4 April.

Secondly, a very urgent issue that requires clarification and a wise approach involves the fact that too many States and non-State actors are very active in Syria. Who is unaware that Syria has been an open field for quite some time? The point is that the situation has worsened and nobody knows what tomorrow will bring. We are therefore facing a much broader and more complicated matter that is likely to get out of hand. In our mind, the priority should be to find a way out before we get to that slippery slope. Now is the time for wisdom to prevail and statesmanship to take the upper hand. One doubts that that has been the case for some time. In that regard, the Secretary-General said today, among other things,

> "The Security Council has the primary responsibility for international peace and security. I call on the Council to unite and exercise that responsibility.
>
> "For too long, international law has been ignored in the Syrian conflict, and it is our shared duty to uphold international standards of humanity." (*SG/SM/18487*)

Thirdly, there is a danger that the Security Council, which is already being marginalized, could lose whatever remaining credibility it might have. That is why, in hind sight, the action taken by the non-permanent members yesterday appears to be not only very timely, but also wise. Will the proposal they made yesterday help find a way out for what otherwise will result in a dangerous development? We believe that it might.

In the light of the fact that the rational for the latest military action is based on the use of chemical weapons — while those responsible remain to be determined and the investigation needs to be speedily concluded — it seems to us that the priority for now should be the adoption by consensus of the draft resolution proposed by the elected members, and, furthermore, as the representative of Egypt said, for the United States and the Russian Federation to exercise greater responsibility and find a way out within their means.

Finally, as we said two days ago (see S/PV.7915), only an inclusive political process will ultimately be able to address the Syrian crisis and prevent the situation from spiralling out of control. There is therefore a need for calm and restraint to de-escalate the situation. We hope that the latest developments will not dampen the prospect for a comprehensive political solution in Syria through the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): We were also shocked by the terrorist act in Stockholm and express our solidarity with and condolences to Sweden.

First of all, I would like to stress that we came here not to discuss yesterday's strike by the United States but the consequences of the terrible and deadly chemical-weapons attack of last Tuesday.

I would also like to draw the attention of my colleagues to the statement issued by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine that indicates, inter alia, that any use of chemical weapons is an outrageous violation of international law and constitutes a war crime; the perpetrators of such acts have to be held accountable; and impunity for a violator of international law in the use of chemical weapons leads to further crimes.

The chronic blocking of the work of the Security Council by Russia is unacceptable. The Syrian regime's sponsors and advocates also bear responsibility for the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Syria and the subsequent deaths and suffering among Syria's civilian population.

The United States actions must be supported to prevent the regime from committing any further war crimes, including against the civilian population. Ukraine considers the United States missile strike against a military target, namely, the airbase from which an air strike to deploy chemical weapons was launched against Khan Shaykhun on 4 April, to be an appropriate and proportionate response. It is a clear signal that the use of WMDs will no longer be tolerated.

Yesterday's events were long overdue. For years, the Council was paralysed with regard to many important international security issues, including the Syrian issue. For all intents and purposes, it was practically held hostage by one delegation that abused its status as a permanent member and practiced the approach of "my way or no way".

The Council's efforts to address the Syrian crisis have been blocked by Russia's use of the veto on seven occasions — that is, seven immobilizing vetoes and the pairs of thousands of Syrian children's eyes who will never see the light of day again. All means were employed to obstruct any meaningful action by the Council: obfuscation, distractions, diversions, outright lies and even bullying. As a result, despite the best efforts of its members on numerous occasions, the Security Council was not able to deliver because of the intransigence of the Russian delegation.

Ukraine does not consider the draft resolution proposed by the Russian delegation to be either adequate to the circumstances or a proper reaction by the international community to the horrible mass murder of people in Idlib province. Given the brutal facts on the ground, it is actually adding insult to injury. We cannot accept a reference to this crime as "the alleged incident with chemical weapons" or "reportedly causing large-scale loss of life". Really? An "incident"? A "reported loss of life"? Does the Russian delegation not watch television? Or maybe it means to assert that what is in that horrible footage from the country was staged.

Furthermore, the draft resolution suggests that the key focus of the international response to the use of weapons of mass destruction against civilians, instead of promoting the prompt identification and bringing to justice of the perpetrators and the taking of steps to prevent future attacks, should be limited to considering the composition of the personnel investigating team based on the principle of a broad-based and balanced geographical distribution. Is this a terribly important issue? No: it is not serious. Such an approach is aimed at postponing practical investigations. We therefore see it as a shameless attempt to undermine the credibility of the Security Council.

When the United Nations is unable to take action, the resulting void is filled. As my delegation stated in this Chamber just two days ago (see S/PV.7915), endless talks cannot be the substitute for concrete action. We also reject the assertion by the Russian Federation that the United States action constitutes an act of aggression. The Russian side has lost the moral high ground in such claims after its invasion of Georgia, its occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea and after launching armed aggression against my country in the Donbass region, which continues until this day. The deafening sound of salvos of Russian Grad missiles and artillery shells pounding Ukraine's territory and bringing death and destruction render hollow all Kremlin statements on the subject of respect for international law. At the very least, the Russians are utterly hypocritical. I call on the Russian delegation to stop mocking the Security Council and stop calling others paranoiacs. Rather, they should look at themselves.

Ukraine continues to believe that the final settlement of the Syrian conflict can be achieved only through a political solution. In the light of the recent escalation, the only way forward is a reinvigorated political process, a reanimation of the ceasefire and a true commitment to a genuine political transition based on Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). We therefore urge the Syrian regime and its backers to think carefully before embarking upon an escalated level once again, and instead read the situation correctly in a way that would give peace a chance.

The events of this week sent a clear signal to all of us. The international community can ill-afford a dysfunctional Security Council. A failure by this body to discharge its duties in an objective manner, to stand up for what is right, to ensure accountability for violators of international law, undermines its moral standing. Moreover, when the time and energy of its members are expended in attempts to achieve unity and consensus by basically shielding the perpetrators of the most vicious of crimes from responsibility, it destroys its credibility.

I call on all members of the Security Council to remember that its main task is not to achieve consensus on any given issue at any cost, but to work diligently and responsibly to maintain international peace and security. When the United Nations is found wanting, opportunistic and unscrupulous types will always rush in to explore opened weaknesses in order to achieve their own political or other goals, thus creating more demand for a just and adequate response. If the United Nations persists in inaction, sooner or later the response will come from outside the United Nations system. Therefore, obstructionists whose identities are well known have only themselves to blame for events not playing out according to their desired scenarios.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

For six years, the world has watched as the Syrian Government and its leader, Bashar Al-Assad, have terrorized their own people. They have murdered hundreds of thousands and displaced millions. They have broken international law and violated numerous United Nations resolutions. They have committed criminal acts that shock the conscience of all humankind.

The international community has repeatedly expressed its outrage. The Joint Investigative Mechanism has found, beyond any doubt, that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons against its own people multiple times. On Tuesday, the Al-Assad regime launched yet another chemical attack on civilians, murdering innocent men, women and children in the most gruesome way. Al-Assad did that because he thought he could get away with it. He thought he could get away with it because he knew that Russia would have his back. That changed last night.

As I warned on Wednesday (see S/PV.7915, when the international community consistently fails in its duty to act collectively, there are times when States are compelled to take their own action. The indiscriminate use of chemical weapons against innocent civilians is one of those times. The United States will not stand by when chemical weapons are used. It is in our vital national security interests to prevent the spread and use of chemical weapons. Our military destroyed the airfield from which this week's chemical strike took place. We were fully justified in doing so. The moral stain of the Al-Assad regime could no longer go unanswered. His crimes against humanity could no longer be met with empty words. It was time to say "enough", but not only say it; it was time to act. Bashar Al-Assad must never use chemical weapons again, ever.

While the Syrian regime is responsible for the chemical-weapon attack, it is not the only guilty party. The Iranian Government bears a heavy responsibility. It has propped up and shielded Syria's brutal dictator for years. Iran continues to play a role in the bloodshed in Syria. The Russian Government also bears considerable responsibility. Every time Al-Assad has crossed the line of human decency Russia has stood beside him. We had hoped the Security Council would move forward but Russia made it known, as it has done seven times before, that it would use its veto once again to cover up for the Al-Assad regime.

Further delay by compromising with Russia for a watered-down draft resolution would have only strengthened Al-Assad. Strengthening Al-Assad will lead only to more murders. We were not going to allow that. But it is even more than that: Russia is supposed to be a guarantor of the removal of chemical weapons from Syria. Think about that. Russia is supposed to have removed all the chemical weapons from Syria. But obviously that has not happened, as innocent Syrians continue to be murdered in chemical attacks. Let us think about the possible reasons for Russia's failure.

It could be that Russia is knowingly allowing chemical weapons to remain in Syria. It could be that Russia has been incompetent in its efforts to remove the chemical weapons. Or it could be that the Al-Assad regime is playing the Russians for fools, telling them that there are no chemical weapons all the while stockpiling them on their bases. The world is waiting for the Russian Government to act responsibly in Syria. The world is waiting for Russia to reconsider its misplaced alliance with Bashar Al-Assad.

The United States will no longer wait for Al-Assad to use chemical weapons without any consequences. Those days are over. But now we must move to a new phase — a drive towards a political solution to this horrific conflict. We expect the Syrian regime and its allies to take the United Nations political process seriously, something they have not done up until this point. We expect Russia and Iran to hold their ally accountable and abide by the terms of the ceasefire. We expect the Security Council to speak loudly and forcefully when the regime or its allies undermine the political process and countless of our own resolutions.

The United States took a very measured step last night. We are prepared to do more, but we hope that will not be necessary. It is time for all civilized nations to stop the horrors that are taking place in Syria and for them to demand a political solution.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, my delegation wishes to thank both the Russian Federation and Bolivia for joining us in the convening of this urgent meeting.

At the very outset, I have a question for the Under-Secretary General, who said that the Syrian Government described the attack as "an aggression", but he did not give us description according to the Charter of the United Nations. At 3.42 this morning, 7 April, the United States, using a number of missiles, committed a flagrant and barbaric act of aggression against a Syrian Arab Air Force base in the central area of our country, which led to a number of people being martyred and many injured, including women and children, as well as wide-ranging material damage.

This treacherous act of aggression constitutes a grave violation of the Charter of the United Nations as well of as all international norms and laws. The United States attempted to justify it with empty pretexts and fabricated arguments that claimed that the Syrian Arab Army had used chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun, without genuine knowledge of what had happened or identifying who was responsible. Those are the very same pretexts used by terrorist organizations and their handlers — in Washington, D.C., Ankara, Riyadh, Doha, Tel Aviv, London and Paris — as well as their media outlets.

The Syrian Arab Republic has stressed that the Syrian Arab Army does not have chemical weapons in the first place; that it would never use such weapons in any of its operations against armed terrorist groups; and that it condemns the use of such weapons as being unjustified under any conditions. In this regard, we would like to note that it has become well known that those weapons have been used and stockpiled in many parts of Syria by armed terrorist groups in cooperation with — or, rather, with a wink and a nod from — certain ruling regimes in the region and outside it, including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and some European States, which completely ignored all the facts and documented information on the use of chemical weapons on many occasions by terrorists in many parts of the Syrian Arab Republic.

This act of aggression will send erroneous messages to terrorist groups, emboldening them them to use chemical weapons in future and to continue perpetrating terrorist acts against Syrian civilians. Following this aggression, Jabhat Al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), both of which are terrorist organizations, and their affiliates waged many attacks on many parts of Syria. However, the Syrian Arab Army and its allies in the war against terrorism are confronting them, despite desperate attempts by others to support them. The American aggression falls under that umbrella.

This condemnable aggression is a grave continuation of the same erroneous American strategy that began six years ago to provide all types of assistance to what the United States calls the "moderate armed opposition". This strategy harms counter-terrorism efforts by the Syrian Arab Army and its partners. It makes the United States of America a partner of ISIL, Jabhat Al-Nusra and other terrorist groups, which from day one of the unjust war against Syria have attacked Syrian army positions

and military bases, as well as our infrastructure and civilians.

Let me recall here in the Security Council that the United States of America leads a purported alliance against ISIL. However, the real achievements of that coalition are killing civilians and striking infrastructure in Syria. Its real goal is to weaken the Syrian Arab Army and its allies as they confront terrorist groups.

It is in that context that we also see the air strikes by this illegal coalition against the Syrian Arab Army in Jebal Thardeh, around the city of Deir ez-Zor, on 17 September 2016, in an attempt to secure a safe corridor for ISIL elements between Syrian and Iraqi territories.

Today's aggression was aimed at saving Jabhat Al-Nusra terrorists following the grave damage inflicted upon them by the Syrian Arab Army and its allies in the centre of the country after they attacked peaceful villages and cities in the area. In that regard, I note that, according to media reports, the United States Congress recently entacted a law allowing the United States Administration to send man-portable air-defence systems to armed terrorist groups in Syria.

Just two days ago here in the Security Council (see S/PV.7893), we warned that three colonialist permanent Member States in the Council had a renewed appetite to repeat the lies and stories spread by the United States and the United Kingdom 14 years ago here in the Chamber to justify the destruction and occupation of Iraq by way of the major lie about weapons of mass destruction. Perhaps diplomatic history has come full circle now in a regrettable, farcical scene in which Colin Powell, the then Secretary of State of the United States, tried to delude the international community and the United Nations in order to justify his country's aggression against Iraq by talking about highly credible information. Today the United States of America pursues its misleading policy to justify its aggression against Syria by relying on fabricated information provided by the Jabhat Al-Nusra terrorists.

This aggression incontrovertibly proves that Syria has always been correct that successive American Administrations will not change their fruitless policies of targeting States and subjugating people to their will and to impose hegemony around the world.

International public opinion and the people of the free world have no doubt that successive United States, United Kingdom and French Administrations have for decades cared neither for democracy or freedom nor for human rights — indeed, let alone the well-being of people or their security and stability. These are just pretexts to wage war and occupy other States, divide them and control their wealth and energy resources. What is truly disgusting today is that these Governments that have supported Wahhabi thinking — the extremist terrorist ideology of the Al-Saud entity since its creation — are today orchestrating and investing in terrorism without any concern for people's lives, including their own, after terrorism arrived at their doorstep, because of these misguided, hypocritical policies.

I assure Council members that if the United States Administration is still delusional that it has succeeded in that blatant aggression in supporting the terrorist gangs and organizations on the ground, the response of the Syrian Arab Republic and its allies will be greater determination to maintain their patriotic duty to defend the Syrian people and to crush terrorism wherever it may be in order to restore security and safety to the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Syrian Arab Republic strongly condemns this act of aggression by the United States of America, which runs counter to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, especially given the status of the United States as a permanent member of the Security Council, which is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security — let alone the fact that such acts of aggression hold the potential to sow total chaos in many parts of the world and will make the law of the jungle the only way to deal with regional and economic crises, with no heed paid to the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

I ask those who talk about the respect of the Charter: Did this colonial trio respect the Charter when they killed millions of innocent people, starting in South Asia and all the way through Latin America? The representative of France spoke about exceptions. They are the ones who should not be the exception and should be held accountable for the July 2016 slaughter of more than 200 civilians by their warplanes in Toukhan Al-Kubra, in Rural Aleppo. They and their allies in what is called the "international coalition" should be held accountable for the killing of more than 800 civilians in Syria from late July 2016 to 22 March 2017. They must be held accountable for their support of armed terrorist groups and for providing them with

political cover so as to continue their acts of terrorism against my own country.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, based on its belief that every effort must be mobilized to combat terrorism, and out of respect for the rules of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities in accordance with the Charter, condemn this act of aggression and ensure that it will not be repeated. It is an act that threatens peace and security in the region and around the world.

The President: I acknowledge the statement made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The representative of the Russian Federation has aksed for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I take the floor again only to say that I would like to ask the representatives of the United States and other countries not to insult my country. They have absolutely no moral right to do so. We do not behave in that way ourselves.

I would simply like to say that Ambassador Haley, who has only just taken up her post here, has a real chance, both as Permanent Representative of the United States and as the current President of the Security Council, to restore the collective work of the Security Council to a healthy state. But that will not happen if she claims a national point of view to be an absolute truth. We would first like to ensure that our work in the Council is mutually respectful.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.